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Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under articles 16 and 17 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Second periodic report of States parties due in 2016

Turkmenistan*

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I. Introduction

1. In preparing the report, the concluding observations of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights delivered at its fifty-ninth meeting, held on 2 December 2011 in Geneva, were taken into account.

2. The present report is the second periodic report of Turkmenistan on key legislative, judicial, administrative, operational and other measures taken during the reporting period to implement the provisions of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

3. The report reflects the steps that the Government has taken and is now taking to give effect to the rights enshrined in the Covenant and the progress made in upholding enjoyment of those rights.

4. In preparing the report, reference was made to the domestic legislation of Turkmenistan, together with material and information provided by State bodies and civil society associations. During the report's preparation, steps were also taken to promote public awareness of its content. The Interdepartmental Commission set up to ensure observance by Turkmenistan of its international obligations in the sphere of human rights and international humanitarian law held a number of interdepartmental meetings and consultations with international experts invited by United Nations agencies. The draft report was circulated to ministries, State committees and government departments and to civil society organizations and their comments and suggestions were taken into account in preparing the final version.

5. The draft report was submitted for coordination and discussion to a round table, which was attended by representatives of the Interdepartmental Commission. Comments and suggestions made at the round table were taken into account in finalizing the report.

6. As it continues its steady progress towards democratic transformation, Turkmenistan has embarked on a new phase of political, social and economic development, the shaping of civil society, and sustainable democratic development. The main objective of this transformative process is to improve the well-being of the people, to raise their level and quality of life and to ensure the full protection of human rights and freedoms and compliance with international obligations.

7. The newly revised Constitution, adopted on 14 September 2016 at the session of the Council of Elders of Turkmenistan, serves as the foundation for the national legal system and as guarantor of the rule of law and human rights and freedoms.

8. The basic law of Turkmenistan plays an important role in strengthening the legal foundations of the State and ensuring successful implementation of the social and economic reforms under way in the country.

9. In accordance with its obligations and as a party to the core international human rights instruments, Turkmenistan is not only incorporating their basic principles and provisions into its domestic legislation, but also setting in place arrangements to ensure their implementation. In recent years a range of welfare-oriented practical measures have been implemented in Turkmenistan and their implementation continues. These include legal, economic and institutional measures.

10. In order further to improve the work of the country's State bodies and civil society organizations aimed at protecting human rights and freedoms, the 2016–2020 national plan of action for human rights in Turkmenistan, the 2015–2020 national plan of action for gender equality in Turkmenistan and the 2016–2018 national plan of action to combat trafficking in persons have been ratified by presidential decree, with a view to giving effect to the rules of international humanitarian law in the legislation of Turkmenistan and its law enforcement practice.

11. All these measures have helped further to deepen democratic processes in Turkmen society and to promote the active participation of citizens in the economic, political and cultural life of the State and the strengthening of civil society.

12. Progressive reforms, introduced under the guidance of the President, are helping to improve domestic and foreign policies and to raise the living standards of the population by maintaining sustainable and vigorous economic growth and financial, social and political stability.

13. The accelerated admission of Turkmenistan to the ranks of the world's developed countries is being significantly facilitated by the country's vigorous investment activity. Large investments are being made both in the productive and in the social sectors, thus enhancing the technological level of production and raising the living standards of the population.

14. It is expected that in 2016 real gross domestic product (GDP) growth rates will be as high as 106.2 per cent.

15. Over the first six months of 2016, 78.7 per cent of the State budget was allocated to the social sector.

16. Attention is also drawn to the effective measures taken in Turkmenistan to foster the growth of incomes in real terms. Over recent years, the high growth rate achieved in this area has been attributable to the sustained annual increase in wages, pensions and State benefits and allowances, improvements in the Government's pricing policies, support for private initiative and the provision of supplementary social benefits, all of which are in line with decrees issued by the President of Turkmenistan. Over the first six months of 2016, by comparison with the same period in 2015, wages rose on average by 9.5 per cent. In this process, by bringing the consumer price index down to the lowest possible level positive growth has been stimulated in both nominal and real income.

17. All in all, the development of the country's different economic sectors is inextricably linked to the successful conduct of ambitious social programmes which are designed to raise the level and enhance the quality of life by upgrading existing and establishing new industries, thereby creating more jobs. Every year, across the country, new plants and factories are commissioned and dozens of new social facilities established, such as schools, kindergartens and medical centres. Over the last months of 2016, 78 new facilities were set in operation, leading to the creation of more than 1,227 new jobs.

18. The loan policies applied by the Turkmen Government are also favourable for its citizens. For example, a decision has been adopted on the granting of long-term loans to businesses for periods of 10 years at an annual interest rate of 5 per cent for the acquisition of capital assets and loans of up to one year for the acquisition of operating assets.

19. Large-scale housing construction remains a priority in the country's social policy, funded both from the State budget and through private investment. In all regions of the country there is extensive construction of affordable housing for different population groups. In the implementation of its social policy, Turkmenistan places particular emphasis on assisting people in every possible way to acquire modern and comfortable housing.

20. Exceptionally favourable conditions are provided in our country for the granting of mortgage loans. To meet their housing needs, Turkmen citizens can obtain 30-year bank loans at 1 per cent interest, with a five-year grace period.

21. Currently, the mortgage lending system is expanding vigorously through the rural areas, small towns and district and provincial centres, for which model homes have been specially designed.

II. Information on the implementation of the concluding observations of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, adopted following its consideration of the initial report of Turkmenistan at its fifty-ninth meeting, held on 2 December 2011

Paragraph 5
Incorporation of the Covenant into domestic laws and policies

22. Through the legal reform under way in the country, Turkmenistan is incorporating the provisions of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in its domestic law.

23. It is adopting relevant legislation to give effect to the rights enshrined in the Covenant and to ensure the further attainment of the Covenant's objectives and the fulfilment of its provisions. Pursuant to article 9 of its Basic Law, Turkmenistan recognizes the primacy of the universally accepted rules of international law.

24. The provisions of the Covenant on the right to work, the right of all people to fair and favourable working conditions, to create and to join trade unions for the implementation and protection of their economic and social interests, and to social security, including social insurance, are reflected in the Labour Code (18 April 2009), the Social Welfare Code (19 October 2012), the Act on trade unions and their rights and guarantees (9 November 2013), the Act on the organization and holding of meetings, rallies, demonstrations and other mass events (28 February 2015), the Employment Act (18 June 2016), the Act on the legally binding guarantee of the deposits of individuals (15 October 2016) and other pieces of legislation.

25. In accordance with article 11 of the Covenant, which recognizes the right of every citizen of Turkmenistan to an adequate standard of living, Turkmenistan has put into effect legislative measures to establish legal guarantees for the implementation of this right. These include the following instruments:

- Act on State pension insurance (31 March 2013);
- Act on the co-funded construction of homes and other properties (31 March 2012);
- Act on State guarantees of the rights of the child (3 May 2014);
- Act on the safety and quality of foodstuffs (16 August 2014);
- Act on the safety and quality of foodstuffs (amended version) (23 November 2016)

and other statutory instruments.

26. As a party to the Covenant, Turkmenistan recognizes the right of everyone to health (article 12). The following instruments have been adopted in pursuit of this objective:

- Act on public health (23 May 2015);
- Act on sanatoriums and spas (4 August 2012);
- Act on physical recreation and sport (23 May 2015);
- Act on countering the spread of disease caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV infection) (26 March 2016);
- Act on medical supplies (12 January 2016);
- Act on the advocacy of and support for breastfeeding (26 March 2016);
- Act on the protection of ambient air (26 March 2016);
- Act on the provision of psychiatric care (23 November 2016)

and many other pieces of legislation.

27. As a party to the Covenant, Turkmenistan recognizes the right of everyone to education (Covenant, art. 13).

28. With a view to establishing legal safeguards for the exercise of this right in Turkmenistan, the right of everyone to education, which is guaranteed by article 55 of the Constitution (14 September 2016), is given effect by the formulation and adoption of the Education Act (4 May 2013), the Act on the State scientific and technical policy (1 March 2014) and a range of statutory instrument

29. Recognizing the right of all citizens to take part in cultural activities, to derive the benefits of scientific progress and its applications and to enjoy the protection of their moral and material interests arising from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which they are the author (article 15 of the Covenant), and pursuant to the provisions of that international legal instrument, Turkmenistan has adopted acts on copyright and related rights (10 January 2012), on science and technology parks (16 August 2014), on the theatre and theatrical activities (8 November 2014), on protection of the country's intangible cultural heritage (28 February 2015), on the protection, export and import of movable properties forming part of the country's historical and cultural heritage (26 March 2016), on cinematography (18 June 2016), on folk arts and crafts (23 November 2016) and others.

Paragraph 7
National human rights institutions

30. In Turkmenistan, steps are being taken to establish a national human rights institution — the Ombudsman system — in accordance with the Paris Principles. The legal framework has been created for the establishment of the institution of Commissioner for Human Rights. Article 71 (17) of the Constitution stipulates that the President shall propose to the Mejlis that it elect a Commissioner for Human Rights; and article 81 (8) that the Mejlis shall elect the Commissioner on the proposal of the President.

31. On 23 November 2016, the Mejlis adopted the Ombudsman Act.

32. The process of drafting the Act involved cooperation by Turkmenistan with a wide range of participant agencies which had been involved with the establishment and strengthening of national human rights institutions, including the United Nations, through its different programmes and offices, such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the European Union and other bodies.

33. International experts made known their opinions during seminars and round-table meetings. In particular, for the purpose of appraising the draft, the involvement of an international expert was enlisted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) office in Turkmenistan. The expert carried out an analysis of the bill and made recommendations. On 8 and 9 July, members of a working group held a discussion of the draft act with representatives of UNDP and the Regional Representative for Central Asia of OHCHR.

Paragraph 8
Non-discrimination and equality

34. The laws of Turkmenistan include rules proscribing discrimination on any grounds, including on the basis of skin colour and descent. Turkmenistan guarantees equal human and civil rights and freedoms and the equality of all citizens and human beings before the law, regardless of ethnic background, skin colour, sex, origin, financial or official status, place of residence, language, attitude to religion, political convictions or any other circumstances (Constitution, art. 28).

35. Under the Education Act of 4 May 2013, citizens of Turkmenistan are guaranteed access to education irrespective of ethnic background, race, sex, origin, financial or official status, place of residence, language, attitude to religion, political convictions, party affiliation or lack thereof, age or health status (art. 4).

36. Under the Employment Act of 18 June 2016, one of the country's priorities is to ensure equal rights and opportunities for all citizens freely to choose their professions, occupations and place of work, and their right to healthy and safe working conditions. Under the Act, foreign nationals and stateless persons permanently residing in Turkmenistan have the same rights in the area of employment as citizens of Turkmenistan.

37. Where legislative provisions on non-discrimination are concerned, the Labour Code of Turkmenistan, ratified on 18 April 2009 and in force since 1 July 2009, includes rules prohibiting discrimination in the domain of employment. Article 7 of the Labour Code prohibits limitations on labour rights or the granting of any preferences in their exercise, irrespective of ethnic background, race, sex, origin, financial or official status, place of residence, language, age, attitude to religion, political convictions or party affiliation or lack thereof, or other circumstances unrelated to the occupational profiles of employees or the results of their work.

38. The Labour Code does not include any additional requirements for documents and "third-generation tests". Under article 25, in concluding an employment contract, a person must submit to the employer the following:

(a) Identity document of a citizen of Turkmenistan (passport or equivalent document; birth certificate for persons under the age of 16);

(b) Military service record for persons subject to military conscription or required to perform military service;

(c) Employment record, except in cases where the employment contract is concluded for the first time or the job is being offered as secondary employment, in combination with another position;

(d) Degree certificate or other proof of education or of professional qualification or attesting to specialized skills for work which, under Turkmen law, requires special education or special training;

(e) Medical report on state of health and other documents confirming other employment-related factors if their submission is required by Turkmen law.

39. In conformity with the second part of the article, when concluding employment contracts employers may not require other documents not specified by the Labour Code.

40. Information about close relatives is provided upon recruitment in compliance with the provisions of the 1995 Act limiting the simultaneous employment of relatives in State executive and administrative bodies and article 22 of the Labour Code, which prohibits the simultaneous service in such bodies and also in the same State enterprises of persons who are closely related by blood or by marriage (parents, spouses, siblings, sons and daughters, and also spouse's parents, siblings and children), if in their work one of them directly reports to or is under the control of the other. The holding of elective office is exempted from this rule.

Paragraph 9
Residence registration and access to employment

41. Under article 6 of the Labour Code, every citizen has the exclusive right to use his or her capabilities for productive and creative work and to engage in any activity not prohibited by law.

42. Every citizen has the right to free choice of employment by direct application to the employer or through public employment agencies (services).

43. As noted above, article 7 of the Labour Code prohibits any discrimination in the domain of employment based on any considerations unrelated to the occupational profiles of employees.

44. By article 6 of the Employment Act of 18 June 2016, the State guarantees the right of citizens freely to choose an occupation, type of employment and place of work, the

provision of safe and healthy working conditions, and equal rights and opportunities for everyone to acquire a profession, employment and remuneration commensurate with the quantity and quality of their work and to receive promotion; their right to legal protection against any form of discrimination, unjustified refusal to hire them, and their unlawful dismissal and termination of employment.

45. In accordance with article 8 of the Social Welfare Code, pensions and State benefits are paid at citizens' place of permanent residence or, upon their written request, at the place where they are habitually resident.

46. Upon application by recipients, pensions and State benefits may be paid into their bank accounts. In such cases, the recipients of such pensions or allowances are required to register every six months with the appropriate local authority of the Pension Fund of Turkmenistan.

47. Under article 97 of the Labour Code, it is an underlying principle of social welfare work that the rights of persons receiving social services should be upheld; that all persons should enjoy equal access to social services and that they should be accessible to persons who need them; and that social services should be provided with due regard for the individual needs of their recipients.

48. Thus, the system of residence registration does not constitute an obstacle to access to employment and social services.

49. Article 37 of the Migration Act, adopted in 2012 and amended and supplemented on 4 May 2013, 9 November 2013, 13 June 2014, 28 February 2015, 26 March 2016 and 12 September 2016, regulates the right of citizens to freedom of movement and choice of place of residence or temporary stay within the country.

50. Under the rules of the Act, every citizen of Turkmenistan has the right, in accordance with the Constitution and other statutory instruments of Turkmenistan, to freedom of movement and freedom to choose a place of residence or temporary stay within the country.

51. Citizens may lodge appeals with higher authorities, officials or the courts against decisions, actions or omissions of State and administrative bodies, officials or other individuals or legal entities that restrict their right to freedom of movement and freedom to reside or to stay in Turkmenistan.

52. Article 43 sets out guarantees of the rights and freedoms of citizens of Turkmenistan, regardless of their residence permit *(propiska)* or registration. The provisions of that article stipulate that all citizens of Turkmenistan shall enjoy the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution and legislation throughout the entire country, irrespective of whether they have a permanent or temporary residence permit.

53. Non-possession of a permanent or temporary residence permit may not be invoked as grounds for restricting citizens' rights and freedoms.

54. The admission of pupils and students to educational institutions is regulated by the Education Act of 4 May 2013 and the standard provisions of the educational institutions concerned.

55. Under article 40 of the Act, Turkmen citizens have the right to choose their educational institution and form of education. Under article 42, parents (or persons acting in their stead) of schoolchildren and students of minority age have the right, until such time as the latter complete compulsory secondary education, to choose their educational institutions and forms of education.

56. Children of minority age are admitted to preschool establishments and general schools, regardless of the place where they are registered as resident, at the place where they are actually resident together with their parents (or persons acting in their stead). There are no statutory instruments restricting the admission of children to preschool establishments and general schools in connection with their residence registration.

57. In vocational training establishments, citizens are admitted on the basis of the locality of the establishment regardless of where they are registered as resident, with the

exception of regional training establishments which are intended primarily for those residing in specific regions.

Paragraph 10
Discrimination against women

58. Article 29 of the Constitution provides that men and women in Turkmenistan have equal rights and freedoms and equal opportunities to exercise those rights and freedoms. Any encroachment on the equality of rights on the grounds of sex is punishable by law.

59. The Turkmen Act of 18 August 2015 on State guarantees of equal rights and equal opportunities for women and men establishes those guarantees for women and men in all domains of State and public life, including that of employment. In particular, women and men are guaranteed equal employment opportunities, the free choice of profession, occupation and place of employment, opportunities for entrepreneurial activities, training and retraining and the ability to balance their work and parenthood responsibilities. The Act also guarantees their equal rights to safe working conditions and to protection against unemployment.

60. Women and men are guaranteed equal rights to participate in the administration of enterprises, institutions or organizations, regardless of their form of ownership.

61. The main pillars of the State policy on employment without discrimination are also formed by the Employment Act of 18 June 2016.

62. In 2015, women made up 42.6 per cent of the economically active population and 44.9 per cent of the total number of people actually employed. Information on the employment of women in the national economy by type of economic activity may be found in tables 1 and 2.

Table 1
Employment numbers in the Turkmen economy, disaggregated by sex and economic sector
(In percentages)

	2015		
		of which:	
	Total	*Men*	*Women*
Turkmenistan — total	**100**	**100**	**100**
Agriculture, forestry and fisheries	**24.1**	5.6	43.6
Mining and quarrying	**1.6**	2.6	0.5
Manufacturing (processing industry)	**12.8**	14.5	11.1
Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	**1.2**	1.9	0.4
Water supply; sanitation, waste treatment and reuse	**0.5**	0.8	0.2
Construction	**9.3**	15.2	3.0
Wholesale and retail trade; Repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	**8.6**	9.8	7.3
Transport and storage	**5.1**	7.0	3.2
Hotel and restaurant business	**1.1**	1.2	1.0
Information and communications	**1.9**	2.4	1.4
Financial services and insurance	**0.7**	0.8	0.5
Real estate activities	**1.6**	1.9	1.3
Professional, scientific and technical activities	**1.4**	2.0	0.8
Administrative and support activities	**1.4**	1.9	0.9
Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	**2.1**	3.2	0.9

	2015		
		of which	
	Total	Men	Women
Education	**13.1**	14.5	11.6
Health and social work	**5.9**	6.3	5.3
Art, entertainment and leisure	**4.1**	4.6	3.6
Other service activities	**3.7**	3.7	3.6

Table 2

Workforce of large and medium-sized enterprises, disaggregated by sex and type of job (2015 data, based on one-off survey, in percentages)

Job type	*Total*	*of which*	
		Men	*Women*
Total employed for the full month of November	**100.0**	**59.7**	**40.3**
of which			
– Legislators, senior officials, managers (directors) of administrative bodies and authorities at all levels, including managers of enterprises	**100.0**	75.7	24.3
– Specialists and professionals	**100.0**	47.0	53.0
– Specialists and support staff	**100.0**	40.5	59.5
– Employees engaged in the preparation of information, processing of documentation, financial accounting and information services	**100.0**	35.7	64.3
– Employees in services, public utilities, trade and related activities	**100.0**	64.0	36.0
– Skilled workers in the agriculture, forestry, hunting, fisheries and aquaculture sectors	**100.0**	79.0	21.0
– Skilled workers at large and small industrial enterprises, in the handicrafts, construction, transport, communications, geology and mineral prospecting sectors, and in related professions	**100.0**	85.8	14.2
– Technicians, equipment and machine operators, fitters and assembly workers	**100.0**	91.3	8.7
– Unskilled workers	**100.0**	48.3	51.7

63. In 2015 more than 80,000 people signed up with employment agencies, compared to 84,000 in 2013. The proportion of employed people is on the rise — from 85.4 per cent in 2013 to 92.2 per cent in 2015. Women constitute 29 per cent of the total number of people registered with employment agencies. In 2013 that figure was 27.7 per cent. In 2015, of the total number of registered women, 89.3 per cent were placed in jobs, as compared to 76 per cent in 2013 (table 3).

Table 3

Number of citizens registered with and placed in jobs by the employment agencies of Turkmenistan

(In thousands)

Year	*2011*	*2012*	*2013*	*2014*	*2015*
Total number registered	**103.6**	**86.5**	**84.0**	**78.2**	**80.3**
– number of whom are women	27.4	24.8	23.3	20.3	23.3
– number of women as percentage	26.4	28.7	27.7	25.9	29.0
Total number placed in jobs	**60.3**	**61.1**	**71.7**	**72.5**	**74.0**
– number of whom are women	13.7	14.5	17.7	18.4	20.9
– number of women as percentage	22.8	23.8	24.7	25.4	28.0

64. The data provided show an upward trend in the employment of citizens, including women. At the same time, the drop in the number of citizens applying to employment agencies is evidence of the creation in Turkmenistan of favourable conditions for the exercise by citizens of self-employment, and in particular their active involvement in small and medium-sized businesses.

65. Under the national plan of action on gender equality in Turkmenistan for the period 2015–2020, it is planned to set in place the necessary conditions for the further expansion of women's participation in all spheres of public life and society.

66. In May 2015, with the aim of creating ample opportunities and conditions to uphold the constitutional rights of citizens to work, to increase the availability of decent work for the population and to develop the country's productive forces, the President of Turkmenistan signed a resolution approving a programme for the period 2015–2020 to enhance the employment sector and create new jobs in Turkmenistan and the action plan for the implementation of this programme.

67. In order to set in place arrangements to create jobs, in particular for citizens in need of social protection, an order was adopted in January 2016 by the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare ratifying the regulations on a quota system at enterprises for the employment of persons with disabilities who are in possession of a recommendation for employment in accordance with their personal rehabilitation programme, and for single parents and large families raising minor children or disabled children. These measures are in compliance with the Social Welfare Code of Turkmenistan, the Employment Act, and the 2015–2020 programme to enhance the employment sector and create new jobs.

68. Further evidence of the implementation of targeted measures to uphold the labour rights of persons with disabilities may be seen in the decision signed by the President of Turkmenistan on 14 October 2016, ratifying an action plan for the period for 2017–2020 to ensure full realization of the labour and employment rights of persons with disabilities in Turkmenistan. A new policy paper on the issue of the employment of persons with disabilities is designed to promote their social rehabilitation, their reintegration in the workforce and the realization of their creative potential.

Paragraph 11
Employment and occupation

69. In accordance with the Employment Act, all citizens are guaranteed the freedom to choose their profession, occupation and place of work at their own discretion; equality of rights and opportunities in gaining a profession, finding a job and earning remuneration commensurate with the quantity and quality of their labour; and assistance in the provision of training, retraining and vocational development for the unemployed and for persons seeking suitable employment.

70. The procedure for recognizing persons as unemployed, and for their registration in and removal from the register has been approved by the Cabinet of Ministers.

71. The payment of unemployment benefit is guaranteed to persons recognized as unemployed in accordance with this procedure. The unemployment benefit is paid out of the State Employment Promotion Fund and the procedure for the creation and use of the fund has been ratified by the Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan.

72. The Social Welfare Code sets out State guarantees for the payment of pensions to citizens on the basis of State pension insurance and the payment of State benefits to certain categories of citizens, and also determines social welfare arrangements for veterans and persons with disabilities.

73. No restrictions may be placed on the right of Turkmen citizens to a State pension. The State also guarantees the allocation and payment of State benefits to citizens entitled to such benefits under the aforementioned Code.

74. The payment of pensions in Turkmenistan is underpinned by a notional defined contribution pension system and a cumulative pension scheme based on pension contributions paid by insurers providing pension contributions in compliance with the Act on State pensions and in accordance with the pensions insurance contract.

75. In preparing employment figures and labour and social statistics no provision is made for collection of data on the ethnic background of citizens, since all citizens, including ethnic minorities, have the right to equal participation both in the work force and

in matters of pension and social security. This provision is enshrined in the Constitution of Turkmenistan, the Labour Code, the Social Welfare Code, the Employment Act and other laws and regulations of Turkmenistan.

Paragraph 12
Situation of women in respect of employment and occupation

76. Article 29 of the Constitution of Turkmenistan sets out guarantees of the application of the principles of the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), of the International Labour Organization and provides for equal rights and freedoms for men and women.

77. Under article 21 of the Act on State guarantees for equal rights and equal opportunities for women and men, the State guarantees women and men equal pay for work of equal value, along with equal treatment in assessing the quality of their work in accordance with the country's labour law.

78. Under the Labour Code of Turkmenistan, wage earners have the right to remuneration commensurate with the quantity and quality of their work. This remuneration may not be less than the minimum wage for Turkmenistan, the level of which is set on the basis of the subsistence level determined by the State Statistics Committee. The minimum wage is set annually by decree of the President of Turkmenistan, pursuant to which wages are also increased, both for men and for women.

79. Under the country's labour law, remuneration is based on the skill level of workers, the quantity and quality of their work, its complexity and intensity, and the conditions under which it is performed. Following those parameters and based on collective agreements (contracts) or pay-scale agreements, the pay rates, salaries, incentives and other benefits of workers are determined, as are the ratios between the wages of the various categories of workers.

80. It should be noted that differences in the workplace, including in wages, resulting from the requirements intrinsic in work of this nature for labour skills associated with the specific need for certain occupational duties to be performed only by persons of a certain sex, and also with differences, exceptions or preferences in employment resulting from the requirements intrinsic in work of this nature or from the State's special concern for persons in need of extra social and legal protection (women, minors, persons with disabilities and others), as established by the law of Turkmenistan, do not constitute discrimination (tables 4 and 5).

Table 4
Average wages in large and medium-sized enterprises disaggregated by sex and type of activity (based on the findings of a one-off survey)

(In manat)

	2014			2015		
		of which:			of which:	
	Total	Men	Women	*Total*	Men	Women
Turkmenistan – total	**1 051.7**	**1 114.6**	**956.6**	**1 150.2**	**1 215.3**	**1 053.5**
Agriculture, forestry and fishery	**899.7**	907.5	851.9	**978.4**	986.8	925.3
Mining and quarrying	**1 493.3**	1 546.8	1 015.0	**1 659.9**	1 714.4	1 111.7
Manufacturing (processing industry)	**922.2**	993.5	799.2	**1 028.0**	1 091.0	915.6
Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	**1 044.0**	1 069.7	930.3	**1 138.0**	1 164.9	1 014.3
Water supply; sanitation, waste treatment and reuse	**1 007.3**	1 015.9	966.9	**1 103.5**	1 116.1	1 044.0
Construction	**1 086.0**	1 109.4	854.0	**1 133.7**	1 155.0	921.4
Wholesale and retail distribution; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	**780.4**	846.3	643.6	**842.8**	904.9	707.5

	2014			2015		
		of which			of which	
	Total	Men	Women	*Total*	Men	Women
Transport and storage	**1 177.2**	1 225.5	920.5	**1 279.2**	1 327.4	1 011.9
Hotel and restaurant business	**983.6**	1 036.4	945.3	**1 069.5**	1 156.4	1 008.7
Information and communications	**1 041.2**	1 076.3	988.3	**1 118.7**	1 149.6	1 069.0
Financial services and insurance	**1 245.0**	1 297.5	1 192.0	**1 350.0**	1 411.5	1 289.1
Real estate activities	**900.0**	938.9	832.7	**976.6**	998.7	937.2
Professional, scientific and technical activities	**1 302.1**	1 382.7	1 143.9	**1 376.2**	1 461.5	1 207.5
Administrative and support activities	**910.5**	971.0	829.7	**1 001.1**	1 073.5	903.7
Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	**1 317.8**	1 407.9	1 001.2	**1 449.8**	1 547.7	1 098.0
Education	**1 048.6**	1 096.4	1 025.6	**1 165.9**	1 248.2	1 126.7
Health and social services	**1 008.6**	1 090.7	977.7	**1 096.2**	1 166.2	1 070.7
Art, entertainment and leisure	**892.5**	956.6	809.9	**965.9**	1 019.9	896.8
Other service activities	**867.5**	907.2	794.1	**974.6**	1 026.5	902.6

Table 5
Women's wages and salaries compared to men's in large and medium-sized enterprises, disaggregated by type of work*

(Percentages)

	2015
Total employed for the full month of November	**86.7**
of whom:	
– Legislators, senior officials, managers (directors) of administrative bodies and authorities at all levels, including managers of enterprises	90.9
– Specialists and professionals	91.1
– Specialists and support staff	90.3
– Employees engaged in the preparation of information, processing of documentation, financial accounting and information services	89.2
– Employees in the areas of services, public utilities, trade and related activities	75.8
– Skilled workers in the agriculture, forestry, hunting, fisheries and aquaculture sectors	93.3
– Skilled workers at large and small industrial enterprises, in the handicrafts, construction, transport, communications, geology and mineral prospecting sectors, and in related professions	66.5
– Technicians, equipment and machine operators, fitters and assembly workers	86.6
– Unskilled workers	83.9

* Based on findings of the one-off survey (November).

Paragraph 13
Trade unions

81. In recent years, fundamental provisions have been included in the law of Turkmenistan to protect the interests of employees in different occupations who are outside national trade unions. For example, under article 18 of the Employment Act, and as provided by the Labour Code of Turkmenistan (art. 14 (2)), trade unions and other representative bodies of workers shall participate in promoting employment and protecting the interests of employees of different occupations.

82. The Act on trade unions, their rights and safeguards of their activities sets out the organizational and legal framework for the formation and activities of trade unions, and also their rights and safeguards of their activities. Under article 9 of the Act, in their activities trade unions shall be independent of State executive and administrative bodies, local authorities, employers and their associations, political parties and other public associations.

83. The Act on the organization and holding of meetings, rallies, demonstrations and other mass events is aimed at upholding the constitutional right of Turkmen citizens to assemble peacefully and to hold meetings, rallies, demonstrations and other mass events. The Act sets out the procedure for the organization and conduct of mass events, guarantees the right of citizens to hold mass events and other rules and provisions ensuring legal safeguards of the freedom of speech and assembly.

Paragraph 14
Social security and the informal sector

84. The State statistical agencies conduct quarterly sample surveys of the labour force covering more than 2,500 households. The survey focuses on the population aged between 15 and 72.

85. According to the 2015 survey, of the total number of able-bodied respondents, men make up 57 per cent and women 43 per cent. On average, the level of those employed in the informal sector was 7.5 per cent of the surveyed working population and women made up 29.3 per cent of that proportion. The proportion of the working population in the informal sector living in rural areas was 9.7 per cent, of which women made up 29.4 per cent (table 5).

Table 6
Figures from a study of the workforce in households

Indicators	*2015*
Proportion of people employed in the informal sector, as percentage	7.5
percentage of those that are women	29.3
Proportion of people employed in the informal sector, living in rural areas, as percentage	9.7
percentage of those that are women	29.4

86. Pensions in Turkmenistan are based on the notional defined contribution pension system and the cumulative pension system based on the individual contribution of each person to the pension fund. Further information on this may be found in paragraph 11 of the present report.

87. In the event that citizens, including those engaged in the informal sector or in personal ancillary, household and other work not based on a labour contract, and also self-employed citizens, have concluded pension insurance agreements with branches of the Pension Fund at their place of residence and have paid their compulsory pension contributions, such citizens, upon reaching retirement age, shall be awarded pension benefits. The above-mentioned categories of citizens are also entitled to join the cumulative pension system by signing an agreement of voluntary pension insurance with the Pension Fund at their place of residence.

88. Persons who, for one reason or another, are not entitled to a pension are guaranteed a State social benefit, which men may receive at the age of 62 and women at the age of 57.

89. Article 23 of the Act on State guarantees of equal rights and equal opportunities for women and men provides for State guarantees of gender equality in the area of social protection in the form of material benefits and social services provided through pension payments, State benefits and welfare assistance in the manner and in cases stipulated by the law of Turkmenistan.

90. Under the Social Welfare Code, the mother or father or guardian of a newborn child, regardless of whether that person is employed in a socially beneficial activity, shall be entitled to a lump-sum welfare payment upon the birth of the child and a monthly allowance for the care of the child until the child reaches the age of 3, which are to be paid from the State budget.

91. If people employed in the informal sector or in personal ancillary, household and other work not based on a labour contract, and also in self-employment, become disabled, they shall be granted a disability pension, regardless of how much they have contributed to the State pension insurance fund. In the event of the death of people in these categories, family members who were dependent on them during life shall be granted survivors' benefits, regardless of the amount contributed by the deceased to the State pension insurance fund.

92. In this way a legal framework, including in the informal sector, has been created to ensure that citizens of all categories have access to social security and other social protection measures.

Paragraph 15
Social support for persons with disabilities

93. The State policy on social protection is designed to uphold the guaranteed constitutional right of citizens to social security in old age and in the event of illness, disability, loss of ability to work, loss of a breadwinner, unemployment and on other legitimate grounds.

94. The Social Welfare Code sets out State guarantees for the payment of pensions to citizens on the basis of State pension insurance and the payment of State benefits to certain

categories of citizens, and also determines social welfare arrangements for veterans and persons with disabilities.

95. Social protection may be provided in cash in the form of pensions and State benefits, or in kind, and also through the provision of various services to persons in need of State support.

96. Through the allocation and payment of State benefits, the State provides social assistance to persons who, by virtue of their inability to work, are not in a position fully to ensure their own livelihood.

97. In order to preserve part of the income lost in connection with partial, complete or temporary incapacity, maternity and childhood, loss of breadwinner, or the attainment of retirement age, the State social welfare system provides for the allocation of State benefits, including for persons with disabilities who have limited opportunities to play a full and effective part in society.

98. Under the Employment Act and the Social Welfare Code, job quotas are set for persons with disabilities, with due consideration for the working conditions in companies, and a procedure is stipulated for the provision of vocational training for persons with disabilities in accordance with their individual rehabilitation programmes.

99. As noted in paragraph 10 above, in October 2016, an action plan for the period for 2017–2020 to ensure full realization of the labour and employment rights of persons with disabilities in Turkmenistan was approved by presidential order. Responsibility for implementation of the plan, developed under the 2015–2020 programme to enhance the employment sector and create new jobs in Turkmenistan, has been vested in ministries, sectoral departments, and local governments of the provinces and the city of Ashgabat. In addition, measures will be taken to expand opportunities for the self-employment and entrepreneurial activities of such persons so that they can run their own businesses.

100. Pensions and State benefits are paid both from the funds accumulated in the pension fund established in February 2012 year and from the State budget of Turkmenistan.

101. The levels of pensions and State benefits are raised every year pursuant to presidential decrees.

102. In 2012 alone, the disability allowance increased on average by 85 per cent, and for persons disabled since childhood it was almost doubled. Since 2011, State disability benefits have increased by a factor of 2.7 (table 7).

Table 7
Social security indicators

Indicators	*2011*	*2012*	*2013*	*2014*	*2015*	*2016 as at 1 July*
Number of persons receiving disability benefit	93 555	103 008	112 014	120 660	129 062	134 530
– of whom, women	47 129	51 652	55 423	60 155	66 122	68 801
– as percentage	50.4	50.1	49.5	49.8	51.2	51.1
Average monthly allowance, in manat	147.46	272.77	297.99	326.95	359.58	395.47
– of whom, women	130.26	238.63	280.60	307.85	329.04	355.79
Number of disabled children up to 16 years of age	10 164	10 945	12 070	13 135	14 086	14 934
Average monthly benefit, in manat	133.0	240.0	264.0	291.20	320.0	357.4
Number of persons disabled since childhood	-	-	34 108	34 959	35 339	36 632
Average monthly benefit, in manat	-	-	339.26	376.11	416.20	455.63

103. Where persons with group I and II disabilities have dependent minor children, a supplementary benefit is allocated for each child, in addition to the pension or State benefit.

104. Persons with group I disabilities and single persons with group II visual disabilities requiring a medical finding on the need for nursing assistance are entitled to a supplementary benefit, in addition to the pension or State benefit, for nursing care.

105. Drugs and medicines, wheelchairs for disabled persons, and prosthetic, orthopaedic and other such appliances are provided free of charge or on preferential terms.

106. In accordance with amendments to the Social Welfare Code introduced in June 2016, the category "disabled child up to the age of 16" has been replaced by the category "disabled child up to the age of 18". In this way, the provision has been brought into line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, now ratified by Turkmenistan, according to which a child is a person below the age of 18 years. At the same time, pension levels for loss of breadwinner have been raised in accordance with the number of dependants and provision made for the payment of this pension to children under the age of 18 who also receive the State disability benefit.

107. Pensions for loss of breadwinner allocated to children on full State support and to children without parental care are paid by local offices of the State Pension Fund into the children's own bank accounts. The money held in the bank account of orphans and children left without parental care earns interest at rates not lower than the refinancing rate established by the Central Bank of Turkmenistan. These funds are released to the children on their application when they reach the age of majority.

108. All orphaned children are under the full care of the State. For this category of children, and also for children without parental care, the Social Welfare Code provides benefits such as annual cash handouts for the acquisition of writing materials and school textbooks, and also for material assistance; free travel on urban passenger transport; priority treatment, free of charge, in State health-care facilities; provision of housing in accordance with the housing laws.

109. Under article 7 of the Act of 10 May 2010 on the bar and advocacy, legal assistance is provided on the form of oral consultations (unrelated to entrepreneurial activities), for persons awarded the title Hero of Turkmenistan, classified as veterans, conscripts, persons with category I or II disabilities, pensioners, mothers with the honorary title Ene Mähri ("maternal care") and orphaned children.

Paragraph 16
Violence against women

110. On 22 January 2015, the President of Turkmenistan, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, approved the national action plan on gender equality in Turkmenistan for the period 2015-2020.

111. In developing the national action plan, due account was taken of the recommendations made by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women during the dialogue in October 2012 at the Committee's fifty-third session.

112. The national action plan provides for a number of specific measures in various fields aimed at creating the necessary conditions for the further expansion of women's participation in the social, political, economic, cultural and humanitarian activities of our country.

113. The national action plan comprises 14 main objectives and more than 60 measures. In particular, the plan includes, among other measures, the monitoring of the national legislation of Turkmenistan in terms of its compliance with international standards in the field of gender equality and the further improvement of methods for collecting and analysing comprehensive data on the status of women. It also provides for raising public awareness on gender issues and raising the profile of women in all spheres of public and political life.

114. Activities under the national action plan are being carried out with the involvement of State executive and administrative bodies, local executive and representative bodies, academic institutions and civil society organizations, and with the enlistment of the expertise of international organizations.

115. One of the tasks set in the plan is the definition of priorities in combating all forms of violence against women. The following measures have been identified to this end:

- Conduct of a survey on the prevalence of violence against women, the forms of such violence and its root causes;
- Organizing a consultation among the appropriate parties on the need to prepare a bill aimed at the formation and development of domestic violence prevention systems that would cover all forms of violence against women;
- Organizing events to raise public awareness of the zero-tolerance policy of Turkmenistan with regard to violence against women.

116. Workshops were held in 2014 and 2015 in partnership with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and with the involvement of an international expert to define the methodology for this survey and to examine other countries' legislation on domestic violence and its application, including through study visits.

117. A draft questionnaire has been developed and is now under discussion. In addition, it is planned to run training courses in 2016 on the conduct of interviews on the issue of domestic violence. Depending on the findings of the survey, proposed amendments and supplements to current national legislation will be developed or a decision will be considered on the advisability of preparing a bill on domestic violence.

118. The Criminal Code sets out provisions on liability for violence against women: article 134, on rape; article 162, on forcing a woman to marry or obstructing a marriage.

119. In addition, a number of offences include as their indicia, or as aggravating circumstances, violence against women, in particular article 101, establishing liability for murder, which includes among its material elements the killing of a woman known by the perpetrator to be pregnant, which incurs more severe penalties in the form of deprivation of liberty for a term of between 10 and 25 years, with or without the additional obligation to live in a specific area for a period of between two and five years.

120. Similar indicia of offences are set out in other provisions of the Criminal Code: article 107, on the infliction of serious damage to health; article 108, on the infliction of

moderate damage to health; article 113, on cruel treatment; article 126, on kidnapping; article 139, on enticement into prostitution; and article 1821, on torture.

121. Thus, the law of Turkmenistan includes provisions which criminalize offences against the person, including against women.

Paragraph 17
Trafficking in persons and prostitution

122. The national action plan on combating human trafficking in Turkmenistan for the period 2016–2018 was approved by a presidential order of 18 March 2016. That comprehensive document outlines specific measures aimed at combating such trafficking.

123. The national action plan specifies the public authorities responsible for the tasks set out in the relevant sections of the document, including the task of preparing a bill on combating trafficking in persons.

124. Based on the provisions of the relevant United Nations conventions and other international legal provisions and bearing in mind the suggestions and recommendations of international organizations and experts with regard to the existing Act of 2007 on the suppression of human trafficking, a bill on combating trafficking in persons was drawn up. The new Human Trafficking Act was adopted on 15 October 2016, during the regular session of parliament, and enters into force on 1 January 2017. The Act defines the main areas of the State policy to combat trafficking in persons, along with the institutional and legal framework for countering human trafficking, and lays out a set of measures for the protection of trafficking victims and for their rehabilitation and assistance, and also for the prosecution of traffickers.

125. In addition, the Act defines the powers of the Cabinet of Ministers, government agencies, and public and international organizations engaged in countering trafficking in persons, which, within their areas of competence, shall take steps to ensure the prosecution of traffickers and bring them to justice, and to identify and eliminate the causes and conditions conducive to human trafficking and the commission of related crimes. Those bodies also work to ensure the protection and rehabilitation of victims of trafficking.

126. The Act introduces regulations dealing with the identification of victims of trafficking and the procedures for granting persons affected by such criminal activities the status of victims of trafficking in persons. Another innovative feature of the Act is the inclusion of provisions governing the establishment and activities of specialized agencies assigned to support and assist victims of human trafficking and to repatriate foreign citizens and stateless persons who are victims of trafficking.

127. Certain articles of the Act are dedicated to the social rehabilitation of victims of trafficking and to providing them with protection and assistance, bearing in mind the specific assistance needed by child victims.

128. In addition, in order to bring the national legal framework into line with international standards on the countering of trafficking in persons, on 23 November 2016 the Mejlis (parliament) of Turkmenistan adopted acts amending and supplementing the Code of Administrative Offences and amending the Criminal Code, which will take effect from 1 January 2017.

129. In accordance with the national action plan on combating human trafficking, the inter-agency working group on the development of the plan has started drafting standard operating procedures for the identification of victims of trafficking. The specified purpose for which these standard operating procedures are being developed is the need to ensure the identification of the victims of all forms of trafficking, including internal trafficking in human beings, in order to restore and ensure respect for the rights of victims. There is also a plan, in the near future, to prepare draft regulations on a system for referring the victims of trafficking to specialized assistance agencies, and for ensuring the safety of trafficking victims, including minors, along with other measures.

130. A number of seminars were held in the course of developing the bill and carrying out the national action plan; they included regional information meetings to share good practices in the implementation of national anti-trafficking plans, the development of legislation and its practical application.

131. Thus, with technical assistance from the mission in Turkmenistan of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), 10 training sessions were organized and run between January and November 2016 for law enforcement officials, judges and representatives of civil society organizations, associations and local authorities, with the assistance of international experts and trainers; two working meetings were held for the members of the working group on trafficking in persons; one round table was organized for senior management representatives; and one regional seminar was held on the need for coordination and an approach which took due account of the interests of victims in combating trafficking in human beings. This seminar was held on 26 and 27 May 2016 in Ashgabat, with 57 participants (Albania, Austria, Belarus, Czechia, Netherlands, Republic of Moldova, Turkmenistan, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America).

132. In addition, study visits were organized for members of the working group on trafficking in persons:

- To Finland, for law enforcement officials and other public organizations to exchange experiences and best practices in the implementation of the national plan of action on in monitoring and reporting: 6–11 June 2016, in Helsinki;
- To Czechia, for members of the working group on trafficking in persons to share experiences and best practices in the national referral system for victims of human trafficking: 19–23 September 2016, in Prague.

133. Under grant agreements with IOM, national public organizations and associations of Turkmenistan, such as the National Red Crescent Society of Turkmenistan, Maşgala ("family"), Däp Dessur ("tradition"), Yeňme ("overcoming"), the Ynam ("trust") Club in Ashgabat, the business entity Beyik Eyyam, the Turkenistan sports club for persons with disabilities, and others, conduct public information campaigns to prevent trafficking, and provide reintegration and rehabilitation support to the victims of trafficking.

134. In collaboration with the Ynam Club and Beyik Eyyam, the IOM mission in Turkmenistan is supporting the operation of two hotlines in the cities of Ashgabat and Turkmenabat. By providing consultations over the hotlines, the necessary information is imparted to the population of Turkmenistan with the aim of preventing the risk of people becoming victims of trafficking.

135. With the support of the IOM mission in Turkmenistan, the Yeňme shelter has been set up and is now operating in Ashgabat, offering temporary residence for victims of trafficking and providing them with rehabilitative care. Work is also under way to maintain the work of the rehabilitation centre and to provide rehabilitation and reintegration assistance to victims, including assistance to migrant victims in returning to their home countries.

Paragraph 18
Polygamy

136. Pursuant to article 163 of the Criminal Code, polygamy — in other words, cohabitation with two or more women within a single household — is punishable by a fine of between 20 and 30 times the average monthly wage, or punitive deduction of earnings for a period of up to two years.

Paragraph 19
Child marriages

137. Article 27 of the Constitution stipulates that a woman and a man who have reached marriageable age have the right, by mutual consent, to marry and start a family. Spouses enjoy equal rights in family relations. Under article 14 of the Family Code of 10 January 2012, men and women of marriageable age have the right to marry and to start a family, regardless of race, ethnic background or religious persuasion. They enjoy equal rights when entering into marriage, during marriage and upon its dissolution.

138. Under article 15 of the Family Code, marriages are registered by the civil registry authorities. The age of marriage is set at 18 years. In exceptional cases, when there are compelling reasons, the custody and guardianship authorities may, at the request of the persons wishing to marry, lower the marriageable age, but by no more than one year. In such cases, the persons concerned acquire full legal capacity from the moment that they enter into marriage. In addition, they continue to have full legal capacity even in the event of dissolution of the marriage.

139. At the same time, marriage may only be concluded with the free and mutual consent of persons desiring to marry, and on their reaching marriageable age (art. 16).

140. In Turkmenistan the problems of early marriage, which is likely to impede girls' education, or the marriage of girls without their consent below the marriageable age do not arise. Marriages in our country are voluntary and subject to the provisos both of consent to the marriage by both bride and groom and of their attainment of the marriageable age. Even before the entry into force of the Code, however, marriages in Turkmenistan were primarily concluded by spouses of majority age after concluding secondary school. Marriage before the completion of secondary school was rare and attributable primarily to the determination and impetuosity of the female spouses themselves but, even in such cases, young persons faced no impediment in completing their mandatory general secondary education and receiving vocational training thereafter. In 2012 a new provision was introduced on the availability of secondary education by distance learning for persons who, for whatever reason, had not completed secondary education in a timely manner. This provides a further guarantee by the State of compulsory secondary education for all citizens of Turkmenistan, even including those who have entered into marriage below the legal age stipulated by the previous family law. The situation as described demonstrates yet again that the problem of failure to complete education because of early marriage does not exist in Turkmenistan.

141. Turkmen criminal law penalizes as a sexual offence against a minor the coercion of a person who has not reached marriageable age into de facto marital relations. Working in conjunction with law enforcement agencies and civil society organizations, the education system is carrying out proactive preventive measures to deter minors from carrying out ill-considered actions, by clarifying the law and the liability which it establishes for such actions and explaining the damage which they cause for further development, together with their negative medical consequences. One of the subjects on the curriculum of general education schools is "essential life skills", whose syllabus includes the study of matters relating to marriage and the family, family relations, preparing young people for family life and reproductive health.

142. In order to prevent child marriages, the necessary planning measures are being carried out by the Juvenile Affairs Division of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. In the course of these activities and with the participation of representatives of the Juvenile Affairs Division, educational institutions, health authorities, local authorities, community organizations and relevant law enforcement authorities, meetings of an outreach and preventive nature are being held in schools and universities on the prevention of unlawful acts, including child marriage and prostitution. Under these plans, underage girls are given legal advice, receive counselling on family planning and pregnancy and are instructed about the legal foundations of the family, among other matters. In addition, a particular focus is placed on prevention and one-to-one work with underage girls, with the aim of forestalling early pregnancy and keeping them away from prostitution. Their parents are also involved in this work.

143. During the reporting period no cases of child marriage were reported in Turkmenistan.

Paragraph 20
Safe drinking water

144. The Drinking Water Act of 25 September 2010 sets out State guarantees of the provision to the public of drinking water. It defines the requirements placed on the State to monitor water quality and its safety for human health and to ensure the protection of drinking water sources and their use and lays down the legal, economic and organizational foundations for the sound use and environmental protection of drinking water from pollution, fouling and depletion and for the functioning of the drinking water supply systems and defines the relationships between the various entities in dealing with the provision of drinking water.

145. Special attention is paid in Turkmenistan to ensuring the sound use of water and the supply of water to the population. On 10 January 2011 Turkmenistan adopted its framework programme for the provision of clean drinking water to the country's inhabited localities and, in accordance with the programme, facilities are being constructed to ensure attainment of that goal. An illustration of this is the commissioning of modern drinking and water purification plants, which have been constructed in all parts of the country. The Government is investing heavily in the construction of new water-supply systems and is working to ensure that the population is provided with clean drinking water. A significant role is played in this endeavour by the building of drinking water plants at natural sources of clean water. Today, there are dozens of drinking water production facilities in provincial and district centres which fully meet the population's needs not only for clean drinking water, but also for various refreshment beverages and juices.

146. Modern plants for the purification and filtration of drinking water are in operation in the country's population centres and desalination plants have been installed on the Caspian coast. Extensive work is currently under way to put into effect the national presidential programme for the upgrading of social and living conditions in villages, settlements, towns and district centres for the period up to 2020, including by improving access to drinking water for the rural population and ensuring the highest health standards.

147. As part of the successful implementation of the framework programme for the provision of clean drinking water to the country's inhabited localities, 10 major water purification plants have been constructed and put into operation — two in Balkan province, one in Daşoguz province, five in Lebap province, and two in Mary province. Currently, construction is under way of 25 new water purification facilities — seven in Ahal province, three in Balkan province, seven in Daşoguz province, four in Lebap province, and four in Mary province. In addition to the framework programme, under a presidential decision of 26 January 2012, 10 small drinking water treatment plants have been built and put into operation — two plants in each province.

148. As part of the national presidential programme for the upgrading of social and living conditions in villages, settlements, towns and district centres over the period up to 2020, between 2008 and 2015 a total of 8,955.6 kilometres of water piping and 1,614 kilometres of sewerage lines were laid and 578 boreholes were sunk. Over the period 2016–2020 it is planned to lay a further 14,141.6 kilometres of water piping and 3,169.8 kilometres of sewerage lines and to sink a further 178 boreholes.

149. In addition, work has been started on the construction of new reservoirs and to increase the capacity of those already in existence, with the aim of improving water availability and ensuring the accumulation of sufficient reserves of water. Construction of phase II of lake Altyn Asyr ("golden age") is surging ahead. This will be the largest hydraulic engineering project of modern times. Through the careful positioning of drainage pipes, saline water is drawn off cultivated fields into the lake, thereby lowering the groundwater level and thus improving the condition of reclaimed land, boosting agricultural yields and enhancing conditions for the flora and fauna of the Karakum desert. In addition, the creation of a new, artificial lake in the centre of the Karakum, one of the greatest deserts

in the world, will help to improve the general environmental situation not only in our country but throughout the Central Asian region, which makes this project a plus in environmental protection terms.

150. Extensive work will continue in Turkmenistan on measures further to improve the welfare of the population and to promote the good health of the nation, in addition to enhancing the effectiveness of the country's water management. The new Water Code of Turkmenistan was adopted on 15 October 2016. The Code has as its objectives the maintenance of an environmentally sound and economically optimal level of water use and the protection of the country's water resources so as to improve the living conditions of the population and to promote environmental conservation.

151. A wide range of measures is being carried out in Turkmenistan for the prevention and control of communicable diseases. Systematic records are kept of patients suffering from intestinal infections and viral hepatitis A and E, and members of infection-prone population groups are vaccinated against hepatitis A.

152. The quality of household and drinking water is constantly monitored to ensure compliance with the national standard. Work is under way to implement the 2011 framework programme for the provision of clean drinking water to the country's inhabited localities and the 2010 Drinking Water Act has entered into force.

153. Over the period 2010–2015 the incidence of hepatitis A declined by 43 per cent and that of dysentery by 28 per cent; typhoid fever has been reduced to isolated cases and poliomyelitis has been eradicated.

154. In Turkmenistan there is mandatory free vaccination of infants against hepatitis B; in 2010, the vaccination coverage rate was 96.1 per cent, rising to 98.9 per cent in 2015. All health workers with a high risk of infection are obliged to receive vaccinations against hepatitis B, for which there is no charge.

Coverage of children vaccinated against hepatitis B (HepB-3)

	2010	*2011*	*2012*	*2013*	*2014*	*2015*
WGB-3	96.1	96.9	97.8	97.8	97.4	98.9

Paragraph 21
Forcible relocation or eviction

155. Under the Criminal Code forced resettlement may be used as a form of punishment: articles 43 and 44 of the Code impose the obligation to live in a specific area, as determined by the court and applied to a person found guilty of an offence.

Paragraph 22
Health-care services relating to sexual and reproductive health

156. The following regulatory and legislative instruments have been adopted in the domain of reproductive health: the Health Care Act (2015); the Family Code (2012); the State and national health promotion programmes (2015); programmes for the protection of the health of mothers, newborn infants, children and teenagers over the period 2014–2018; the reproductive health programme for the period 2011–2015; the programme for improved perinatal care for the period 2014–2018; the programme to combat malignant breast tumours and cervical cancer; the national action plan for a minimum package of initial services at a time of humanitarian crisis; the road map for the promotion of developmental paediatrics and a national early intervention service in Turkmenistan for the period 2015–2020; orders of the Ministry of Health and the Medical Industry of Turkmenistan.

157. The country's reproductive health service includes reproductive health centres for women, men and teenagers.

158. Services are provided at three levels: by specially trained family doctors in rural health centres and 104 reproductive health units; by six regional centres; and by the National Reproductive Health Centre.

159. Members of the public can obtain family-planning services, means of contraception, and advice and information materials on reproductive health. Ten brands of contraceptives are included in the list of essential medicines.

160. Under the 2013 memorandum of understanding between the Government of Turkmenistan and UNFPA, by 2017 the country will have fully switched to government procurement of modern contraceptives.

161. Specialists from the reproductive health care service, working jointly with women's and youth organizations and with support from UNFPA, are conducting a range of campaigns, training sessions and workshops to promote women's reproductive rights and to heighten awareness about available reproductive health services.

162. With the use of Channel management software, the National Reproductive Health Centre is able to monitor the timely use of the different methods and types of contraceptives, evaluate the availability of a sufficient level of reserves across the country (with UNFPA support), make annual orders and distribute materials to the regions. This system is available in 83 per cent of the units offering family-planning services.

163. In order to improve the health of expectant mothers, a new tool was introduced in 2013 for assessing the quality of the services provided in the field of family planning. Groups at risk were defined and a new accounting form for the sector was introduced, together with an indicator that determines the level of contraceptive prevalence among high-risk women. A medical passport for the reproductive health of mothers was introduced.

164. Contraceptives are not used in Turkmenistan for birth control but to improve health, including the reproductive health of women at risk. The coverage of women of childbearing age by different types of contraception measured 35 per cent in 2010 and 25 per cent in 2015. Thanks to extensive work by the reproductive health units to improve women's health and promote the sound use of contraceptives, combined with the higher birth rate, it has been possible to improve the contraception coverage of women at risk from 21 per cent in 2013 to 69 per cent in 2015.

Proportion of women using contraceptives, 2010–2015, as percentage

	2010	*2011*	*2012*	*2013*	*2014*	*2015*
Proportion of women using contraception, as percentage	34.0	32.6	29.2	27.0	25.4	25.0
The proportion of women at risk using contraception, as percentage				21.0	48.0	69.0

165. Over the period 2010–2015 the abortion rate dropped by 25 per cent, in all age groups, dropping 22 per cent in the under-20 age group, by 22 per cent in the 20–34 age group and by 47 per cent in the 35 and over age group.

Number of abortions among women of childbearing age, 2010–2015

	2010	*2011*	*2012*	*2013*	*2014*	*2015*
Overall number of abortions	15 306	16 273	18 270	11 641	12 082	11 465
of which:						
– under 20 age group	1 028	1 250	1 067	828	802	798
– 20–34 age group	10 921	11 696	13 049	8 777	9 301	8 903
– 35-and-over age group	3 357	3 327	4 154	2 036	1 979	1 764

166. An assessment of the implementation of the national strategy for the prevention of cervical and breast cancer, developed in partnership with UNFPA, was carried out in 2013 with the assistance of a World Health Organization (WHO) expert, Lawrence von Karsa, from the International Agency for Research on Cancer in Lyon, France. The assessment showed that the country has a well-functioning system for the early detection of breast cancer.

167. That finding was confirmed by the results of the STEPS risk factors survey, conducted in 2013–2014 with the assistance of WHO and using its methodology, which found that the percentage of women in the 30–49 age group who have ever undergone screening for cervical cancer was 62 per cent.

168. In 2016, the country launched the immunization of boys and girls at the age of 9 against human papilloma virus.

169. Matters relating to the reproductive health of young people have been highlighted in the study on the needs of young people for adolescent reproductive health services, carried out in 2008 by the Ministry of Health and the Medical Industry and UNFPA. Awareness by teenagers of contraception proved to be moderately high, while their knowledge of means of protection against HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections was found to be inadequate.

170. A 2013 survey of the availability and accessibility (affordability) of contraceptives in reproductive health facilities and the pharmacy network showed that modern contraceptive methods are generally available in public and private health facilities, most of which offer at least three contraceptive methods.

171. International sample surveys on health behaviour in school-aged children (HBSC) were carried out in Turkmenistan in 2011 among schoolchildren aged 15 and, in 2013, among schoolchildren aged 13 and 17. The study included issues relating to sexuality, reproductive health, and teenagers' awareness of sexually transmitted infections and the data gathered formed the basis for the development of a national strategy on reproductive health.

172. Turkmenistan has made significant progress in reducing maternal mortality through policies to strengthen health systems and to empower women.

173. The reduction of mortality and morbidity among women has been facilitated by improvements in social and economic conditions and the quality of obstetric facilities, by work to promote the health of women of childbearing age, by clinical interventions, updated in accordance with the latest scientific findings and international guidance, and by the introduction of effective perinatal technologies developed by WHO under its Safe Motherhood Initiative.

174. Over the past five years, the WHO standards on the provision of medical assistance in obstetrics have been incorporated in national clinical protocols (more than 30) and guidelines, which are followed by more than 70 per cent of the maternity hospitals across the country. They have been introduced into the curriculum of the medical university. Improvements have been made to the infrastructure and health and safety conditions in most medical institutions; the reliable supply of basic medicines has been assured; intrapartum and neonatal technology packages recommended by WHO have been introduced and these have made it possible to boost the neonatal survival rates for infants weighing 500–1,500 grams from 15.5 per cent in 2005 (prior to the country's adoption of the standards for the registration of live births and stillbirths) to 58 per cent in 2014. The early antenatal coverage rate (up to 12 weeks) is 99 per cent.

175. Through the extensive application of effective perinatal technologies it has been possible to reduce prenatal and postnatal haemorrhaging and cases of late gestosis. The proportion of deliveries by Caesarean section, as a contingency to reduce perinatal and maternal mortality, measured 9.5 per cent in 2015, which is below the limit recommended by WHO (15 per cent). In many health establishments the number of radical obstetric interventions and the use of blood products have been reduced, which in turn has helped to cut expenditure on drugs.

176. According to figures from the Ministry of Health and the Medical Industry, over the past five years the maternal mortality rate has twice decreased and, in 2015, it measured 3.0 per 100,000 live births.

Maternal mortality rate

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Maternal mortality rate per 100,000 live births	6.9	5.9	3.8	3.1	3.0	3.0

177. Almost all births take place in maternity facilities and are attended by qualified staff. This rate remains persistently high, at 99.9 per cent of all births (the proportion of home births is 0.1 per cent).

Proportion of live births attended by qualified obstetric staff

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Proportion of live births attended by qualified obstetric staff, as percentage	99.9	99.9	99.9	99.9	99.9	99.9

178. In 2009, 2011 and 2012, the Ministry of Health and the Medical Industry, working together with UNFPA, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and WHO, carried out assessments of the national safe motherhood programme. The assessments showed where good progress had been made and where further work was needed.

179. From 2014, health services in this area have been divided up by regions and a three-tier perinatal service has been established; the perinatal centres have been equipped with the necessary equipment and specialized vehicles; a system of operational algorithms has been devised for use by family doctors, obstetricians and gynaecologists in dealing with obstetric emergencies.

180. The WHO technique for analysing critical obstetric cases has been introduced. In 2015 alone, some 30 critical cases were analysed in five pilot districts.

181. In 2015, workshops were held in Ashgabat and five provinces for obstetric and gynaecological specialists and for statisticians in the classification of preventable maternal mortality, attended by a total of 120 specialists.

182. Managers and health professionals visited the Republic of Moldova to study that country's experience with the introduction of regionalization.

Paragraph 23
Health-care services, including prevention of HIV/AIDS and other illnesses

183. Issues of reproductive health and maternal and infant mortality rates are covered in the section under paragraph 22.

184. Efforts to prevent HIV/AIDS are led by the National AIDS Prevention Centre, the five regional AIDS prevention centres and 36 specialized diagnostic laboratories.

185. The relevant laws and regulations are the Act on countering the spread of disease caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV infection), of 26 March 2016, and the national programme to combat HIV infection for the period 2012–2016.

186. The AIDS prevention service conducts tests for HIV infection, pre-test and post-test counselling and prevention activities, and also ensures the security of blood and medical procedures; it also carries out awareness-raising activities and prepares and produces information materials tailored to the age and specific features of the target groups.

187. Cost-free and compulsory testing is carried out in Turkmenistan for HIV infection of donors and recipients, pregnant women, medical professionals who have contact with body

fluids, patients requiring prompt treatment and those with cancer, tuberculosis, hepatitis B and C, herpes virus and other infectious diseases.

188. Since 2007, an information resource centre for women whose behaviour puts them at risk has been in operation, with financial support from UNDP and UNFPA. By use of the centre's hotline, members of the public can obtain information without restriction and free of charge.

189. In 2010 a back-up stock of antiretroviral medication was established, and this is updated annually.

190. National trainers who have undergone specialized training in Austria, the Russian Federation and Ukraine instruct staff of the specialized diagnostic laboratories in modern forms of HIV diagnosis. The test systems are procured through UNICEF with funds from the State budget.

191. In joint efforts with international experts, national guidance manuals and clinical protocols have been developed on HIV infection in two languages (Turkmen and Russian):

- In their classes on essential and healthy life skills, schoolchildren learn about the prevention of HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections, reproductive health and healthy lifestyles. Teachers teaching this subject attend seminars on the prevention of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections;
- Awareness-raising activities on HIV/AIDS-related issues are carried out on a large scale, including for teenagers and children, providing information on how the virus is transmitted and how to protect against it. With the support of UNDP, information materials in Russian and Turkmen are purchased and disseminated.

192. Contraceptives may be ordered and are distributed free of charge via the AIDS prevention services, dermatological and sexually-transmitted-disease services, gynaecological clinics and reproductive health centres.

193. Every year on 1 December informational and educational events are organized, to mark World AIDS Day.

194. Working in collaboration with UNFPA, the Health Information Centre is carrying out peer-to-peer activities in all regions. Two youth centres have been opened, in the cities of Ashgabat and Mary. Specialists at the campus health centre have been conducting discussions with university students, high-school pupils and military paramedics. Young people use the hot line at the Health Information Centre to obtain cost-free consultations with a psychologist and a gynaecologist.

195. Turkmenistan has been supporting the WHO strategic plan for the European region to move from malaria control to elimination by 2015. In 2010, based on their assessment of the malaria situation in the country, WHO experts added Turkmenistan to the list of countries which had succeeded in eradicating malaria. At the current time, work is continuing to maintain the country's malaria-free status.

196. The epidemiological situation of tuberculosis (TB) remains under close scrutiny by the Government of Turkmenistan and the Ministry of Health and the Medical Industry. The current national strategy for the prevention and control of tuberculosis is based on the WHO Stop TB programme and the global Stop TB Partnership.

197. The identification of patients with bacilliform tuberculosis and their chemotherapy treatment under the directly observed short-course (DOTS) programme are carried out in compliance with an instruction by the Ministry of Health and the Medical Industry formulated jointly with experts from WHO.

198. The issue of tuberculosis is included in the postgraduate syllabus of the Medical University and training in this area is administered to all doctors, including those working in the prisons sector and the military.

199. Data on tuberculosis are published annually in the WHO report: Global Tuberculosis Control: Surveillance, Planning, Financing.

200. In 2009, the Centre for the Prevention and Treatment of Tuberculosis was amalgamated with the Centre for Infectious Diseases and re-equipped with up-to-date European X-ray and photofluorographic equipment. The work of the Centre's laboratory is sponsored by the supranational reference laboratory in the city of Bilthoven, Netherlands, which in 2009 carried out the laboratory's certification and trained Turkmen experts at both national and provincial levels. The bacteriological laboratory carries out molecular diagnostic tests for the accelerated identification (in two and a half hours) of drug-resistant tuberculosis.

201. Since 2014 the Institute of Microbiology and its medical laboratory in Germany have been carrying out external quality control of the laboratory's tuberculosis diagnoses.

202. A tuberculosis control service has been incorporated in the primary health care system and an outpatient care model is being introduced for the nursing of tuberculosis patients.

203. National guidelines, recommendations and protocols have been set in place, based on international standards and WHO recommendations.

204. Infection control measures are being implemented in tuberculosis clinics, in compliance with international standards.

205. A computer-based register of tuberculosis patients is being developed and the software programme e-TB Manager is being piloted in the province of Mary.

206. The national tuberculosis programme is being implemented in cooperation with other ministries and departments.

207. Over the period from 2010 to 2015 the incidence of tuberculosis declined by 30 per cent (from 56.0 to 39.1 per cent); its prevalence dropped by one half (from 187.5 to 106.5) and mortality by about one third (from 56.0 to 39.1). Treatment efficiency indicators remain high.

Tuberculosis incidence, prevalence and mortality, 2010–2015, per 100,000 population

Paragraph 24
Access to health-care services

208. Within the primary health-care system, there are 31 urban health clinics, 918 rural health centres and 607 rural health clinics which form part of the district hospital system. With their network of day-patient facilities, the health clinics are able, on an outpatient

basis, to provide a number of the medical services performed in hospitals. Every year, more than 41,000 persons receive treatment in these day-patient facilities.

209. The provision of health care is rendered increasingly more effective both by providing home-based services and by optimizing inpatient care.

210. High-tech medical services, in line with international standards of excellence, are provided in the capital through its centrally managed and comprehensive medical facilities and a number of highly specialized clinics. A number of centres, in the areas of diagnostics, cardiology, internal diseases, diseases of the head and neck, dentistry, ophthalmology and neurology, and also the Ene Mähri perinatal centre, have been brought under a single administration system.

211. Similarly, a number of centres in the areas of prevention of tuberculosis, dermatology and venereology, infectious diseases, AIDS prevention and haematology share a combined management and a centralized laboratory.

212. The specialized clinics in Ashgabat and comparable facilities in the provinces, in such fields as diagnostics, emergency response, oncology, and maternal and child health, together with the Ene Mähri perinatal centres, form a network of health institutions which each specialize in a given area. The specialized clinics and centres coordinate the work performed by corresponding services in the different regions of the country.

213. Over the period 2010–2015, a total of 15,754 pieces of state-of-the-art equipment manufactured by world-class firms were delivered to the country's health facilities.

214. Over the same period the number of hospitals rose to 120 and, with the opening of a number of high-tech health centres, the number of hospital beds increased from 20,636 to 22,014. By rationalizing the use of inpatient places and through the full examination of patients either upon or prior to their admission to hospital, it has been possible to cut the average hospital stay from 15.4 to 6.5 days.

215. As part of the national presidential programme for the upgrading of social and living conditions in villages, settlements, towns and district centres for the period up to 2020, between 2008 and 2015 a total of 9 new hospitals and 73 health clinics were put in operation in the countryside and the existing 51 hospitals and 48 health clinics were refurbished. These are all are equipped with modern medical equipment, ambulances and the necessary medicines.

216. For the provision of accident and emergency services, over the period 2009–2015, State budget funds were used to buy 508 ambulances equipped with communications equipment, GPS mobile terminals and other technology. The Extreme Medicine Centre has been equipped with a high-performance Super Puma AS332L2 helicopter.

217. To ensure implementation of the State programme for the development of the pharmaceutical industry in Turkmenistan over the period 2011–2015, six new plants have been commissioned for the manufacture of finished drugs and medical appliances, most of which are included in the list of medicines available to the public on prescription at reduced rates.

218. A major focus of the Government's policy is the organization of sanatorium and spa treatment and leisure facilities for citizens. The Government has invested more than $200 million under the State programme to upgrade the physical infrastructure and technical facilities of health resorts. Between 2010 and 2015, the number of places in these resorts increased by 37 per cent — from 2,391 to 3,266, and the number of citizens making annual trips to the resorts increased by 45 per cent — from 61,696 to 89,198.

219. The process of developing the health-care system and kitting out health facilities with up-to-date equipment is placing greater demands on the level of training and retraining of specialists. Increased demands are also being made of the competence of family doctors by the promotion of home-based medical care and strengthening of primary health care.

220. Between 2010 and 2015, the total number of doctors increased by 5 per cent and that of nursing and paramedical staff by 7 per cent. In 2015 there were 13,600 doctors

and 24,300 nurses and paramedics; the doctor-patient ratio was 25.5 for every 10,000 inhabitants, while that of nurses and paramedics was 45.9.

221. Medical professionals undergo their training at the Turkmen State Medical University and the country's five medical colleges. In its nine faculties, the Turkmen State Medical University trains medical and pharmaceutical specialists. Over the period 2010–2015, the number of students completing their courses and graduating rose by 10 per cent. The training resources available to the University have been augmented with three university clinics: a scientific and clinical centre, a dental training and production centre and a maternal and child-care training and research centre.

222. The medical colleges offer degree courses for nurses and paramedics in seven specialized fields, and also provide postgraduate courses. In recent years, the number of students enrolled in the medical colleges has increased by 117 per cent.

223. Every year, some 2,500 physicians and pharmacists undergo further training at the Medical University in 31 departments, covering 51 specialized fields and disciplines. In addition, training of at least 60 hours is provided every year for specialists in home-care medicine.

224. Over the period 2013–2016, under bilateral intergovernmental agreements, some 240 Turkmen doctors have been trained as specialists in various medical fields in Austria, China, Germany, the Russian Federation, the United States of America and other countries. Some 70 professionals have undergone internships in leading clinics in Germany. With the participation of German professors, in-service training and skills upgrading continue in Turkmenistan, with joint consultations, diagnostic exercises and the therapeutic and surgical treatment of patients, along with classes, lectures and conferences organized as part of joint research projects in the various fields of medicine.

225. Over the past five years (as at 1 July 2016), 371 Turkmen citizens have received medical degrees and performed internships at higher educational institutions in Belarus, China, the Russian Federation, Turkey, Ukraine and other countries.

Paragraph 25
Education

226. In Turkmenistan there are a number of secondary and higher vocational educational institutions which specialize in teacher-training, such as the Seyitnazar Seidi Turkmen State Pedagogical Institute, the Magtymguly Turkmen State University, the Dovletmamed Azadi Turkmen National Institute of World Languages, and the Aman Kekilow, Beki Seytākow and Hydyr Deryayew secondary vocational teacher-training colleges. The National Institute of Sport and Tourism and the National Conservatory train teachers in physical education and sport, music and singing. In addition, after completing the procedure for the recognition of their qualifications, graduates of the teacher-training institutions of foreign States are given teaching posts. Teachers are trained to meet the demand for teaching staff and, as a result, there is no acute shortage of teachers across the country in the various educational institutions. Owing, however, to the tendency for qualified professionals to settle in towns and district centres, there is a lack of teachers in the more remote villages rural settlements, attributable also to a number of other factors, such as remoteness and sparse population, while a surplus of teaching staff may be found in the country's centres of culture. The education authorities are taking various measures to ensure that qualified teachers are evenly distributed among the country's educational institutions. A range of effective measures are being applied to ensure the equitable distribution of teachers graduating from education colleges, including the provision of various social benefits for teachers in general education schools and rural schools. For example:

- Under the law on military conscription and military service (Education Act, art. 45 (2)), military call-up is deferred for teaching staff with degrees in education and working in the State education system in general education schools in rural settlements, for the period of their employment in such schools;

- Teachers and other members of the teaching staff of general secondary educational establishments and secondary vocational colleges who have registered as in need of better accommodation are included among those accorded priority in receiving housing from the State Housing Fund (Housing Code, art. 68).

227. On 1 March 2013, the President of Turkmenistan issued a decree on measures to enhance the education system in Turkmenistan and a decision on the provision of general secondary education, which included the adoption of a road map for the transition to a 12-year general education cycle in Turkmenistan. Then, in May 2013, a new version of the Education Act was promulgated.

228. In accordance with these instruments, the transition to the 12-year general education cycle commended with the 2013/14 school year. Children are admitted to the first grade from the age of 6.

229. Under the road map for the transition to a 12-year cycle, a number of new subjects have been introduced to the curriculum of secondary schools, such as basic economics, environmental studies, the cultural heritage of Turkmenistan, world culture, social conduct, information and communications technology and technological innovation, mathematical modelling and graphics.

230. Reform of the country's educational system in these promising directions is continuing. As part of the reform process, provision has been made for further implementation of the road map for the transition to a 12-year general education system, the State programme for the development of the education system in Turkmenistan over the period 2012–2016, and other relevant instruments.

231. In addition, among these reforms and planned activities work will continue on the following undertakings: construction of educational institutions; equipping and upgrading of the infrastructure of existing educational facilities; advancement of the education and training system in the light of education policies, international experience and existing key instruments underpinning the country's education system, and with the aim of promoting science and technology, and modern publishing technologies; development of higher education, the opening of new universities and the launching of new special fields, with due regard for the country's social and economic development needs; delivery of innovation, modern technology and teaching methods, with the aim of boosting the quality of education at all levels; measures to improve the teaching of foreign languages at all levels of education, taking into account best practices in Turkmenistan and abroad; upgrading of the skills of teaching staff, including on courses abroad; development of a multisectoral approach to educational tasks; and cooperation in matters of education with foreign countries and international organizations.

232. Every year, the physical infrastructure and technical equipment of existing educational institutions are upgraded. They are equipped with modern multimedia equipment, computers, language labs, laboratory equipment and other installations.

233. Modern preschool establishments, general schools, secondary and higher vocational colleges, children's health centres, sport schools, stadiums and other leisure and recreational facilities are under construction. For example, over the period from 1991 to 2006, a total of 74,249 preschool facilities and general schools were built and set in operation and, between 2007 and 2015, 267 preschool facilities and 188 general schools. On one day, 1 September 2015, 25 new general schools, 15 preschools and the Aman Kekilow College, a campus-style secondary vocational college in Ashgabat, all opened their doors for the first time. By the opening of the 2016/17 academic year, a number of new educational facilities had commenced operation, including the Oguz Khan University of Engineering Technology and a general education school in Ashgabat, which have Japanese and English as their medium of instruction.

234. In all these new educational establishments the necessary conditions are provided to ensure that the younger generation in Turkmenistan receive a decent and good-quality education.

235. On 1 September every year since 2011, each first-grader has received a personal computer as a gift.

236. In Turkmenistan, textbooks and teaching aids are provided free of charge in State educational establishments. Close attention is paid to the publication and re-issue of textbooks and other educational and instructional materials. Thus, between 2015 and 2007 the volume of textbooks and teaching aids published increased by a factor of 2.17.

237. In addition to the two universities, in State colleges of higher vocational education tuition is provided free of charge, funded from the central budget, and students receive grants.

238. Admission to State vocational training institutions is on a competitive basis, upon application. The rules of the competition ensure that the right of citizens to education is guaranteed by the State and that the candidates enrolled are those most capable and best prepared for the vocational training programme in question.

239. It is illegal to charge unofficial fees for access to higher education establishments and the criminal legislation of Turkmenistan establishes criminal liability for the receipt of bribes by officials and the practice of fraud. When detected, such practices incur penalties under criminal law. Concerted efforts are being made to fight corruption; to that end, in 2014 Turkmenistan adopted its Anti-Corruption Act.

Paragraph 26
Access by minorities to education

240. Under the Constitution, Turkmen is the official language of Turkmenistan and the right of all citizens of Turkmenistan to use their mother tongue is guaranteed. There are schools in the country which do not use the official language as the medium of instruction. It is not prohibited for ethnic minorities to use their mother tongue and to study their mother tongue — indeed, their right to do so is guaranteed. The lack of schools offering mother-tongue instruction for ethnic minorities that are few in number is attributable to difficulties in finding teachers and teaching materials, their economic viability and other factors. It is not prohibited for people to obtain education through out-of-school courses and all educational activities are subject to licensing by the Ministry of Education. It should be noted that, over the years of independence, no requests have ever been submitted for courses teaching any ethnic minority language.

241. Turkmen citizens follow educational and training courses outside Turkmenistan both on the basis of international agreements and by private arrangement, subject to the regulations on the procedure for the training of Turkmen citizens at secondary and higher vocational colleges of foreign States, approved by a presidential decision of 19 April 2013. These regulations place no restrictions on study outside Turkmenistan; furthermore, the diplomas awarded by secondary and higher vocational colleges of foreign States are recognized in Turkmenistan. The Labour Code provides for additional days of leave for people attending courses, including in foreign countries. The only restrictions on travel abroad are those established under the Migration Act for significant breaches of the law, but these did not relate specifically to the attendance of courses outside Turkmenistan.

Paragraph 27
Gender parity in education

242. In Turkmenistan, in accordance with the country's law, women and men are free to choose their field of study. Admission to all civil vocational colleges takes place without any restrictions on the grounds of sex. Gender stereotypes in the choice of field study persist, however, and it is evident that more women follow vocations in such areas as education, health care and the humanities, while men predominate in technical and security-related fields and in the sciences. The Government is making concerted efforts to eliminate remaining gender stereotypes, to create more opportunities for women to be trained in the technical and security sectors and in the sciences, and to raise awareness of gender equality in all spheres of life, including in family relations.

243. A vigorous campaign is being conducted to attract more men to the teaching profession, in particular for general education schools, with the aim of ensuring that teaching is administered in such schools by members of both sexes.

Paragraph 28
Rights of minorities to enjoy their own culture

244. A great deal of attention is paid to development of the cultures of other ethnic groups living in the country, alongside the national culture of the Turkmen people. As part of a conference on Turkmenistan and its historical and cultural heritage held from 15 to 17 June 2016, on the occasion of the proclamation of the province of Daşoguz as 2016 cultural capital of the Commonwealth of Independent States, and attended by academics from Commonwealth member States, an exhibition of cultural ceremonies followed by the Uzbek people was held in the new village of Bagtyar Zaman. The exhibition was inspired by the arrival in the village of an Uzbek family, which had moved into one of the new houses.

245. In July and August 2016, following the settlement in the villages of Uzbek, Russian, Kazakh and Azeri families, exhibitions of Uzbek, Russian, Kazakh and Azeri culture were held in villages in Lebap, Mary and Balkan provinces which had recently been fully renovated.

246. Festivities currently being celebrated with the participation of performers and cultural figures from Turkmenistan and abroad are helping to strengthen the existing friendly relations and to enhance and enrich the cultural and creative cooperation between these performers and artists. Friendly relations with different countries around the world are constantly being extended and strengthened.

247. The deep respect in our country for the culture, traditions and history of other peoples is clearly demonstrated by the celebration of Days of Culture in recognition of the following countries: Islamic Republic of Iran, from 4 to 8 March 2015; United Arab Emirates, from 24 to 28 March 2015; People's Republic of China, from 4 to 6 August 2015 and also from 14 to 17 October in the city of Mary and the city of Xi'an in the Shaanxi province of China; Republic of Belarus, from 2 to 4 February 2016 in the cities of Ashgabat and Turkmenabat; Islamic Republic of Iran, from 2 to 4 February 2016; Kyrgyz Republic, from 14 to 16 June 2016. During the Days of Culture a range of events are held with the aim of strengthening friendly relations, promoting the distinctive identity of the various ethnic cultures and safeguarding their heritage.

248. As part of the programme to mark the proclamation of Daşoguz as cultural capital of the Commonwealth in 2016, a seminar was held in the cities of Ashgabat and Daşoguz on 21 and 22 September 2016 with the participation of librarians from the States members of the Commonwealth of Independent States on the theme of the role of books in ensuring the careful preservation and promotion of the ancient heritage of peoples and, from 2 to 4 November 2016, an international scientific conference on the role of the Göroğly epic in world culture. It is planned to hold Days of Culture in recognition of the Republic of Turkey from 15 to 17 December 2016.

249. In 2013 Turkmenistan hosted international celebrations of the Nowruz holiday, which were attended by State leaders and representatives of the United Nations. The venue for the celebrations in 2016 of the national day of spring, in the Akbugdaý district of Ahal province, was officially renamed "Nowruz ýaýlasy" ("Nowruz valley") and a monument to friendship was inaugurated at this site.

250. The country's relations with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) rest on the solid foundation of joint efforts aimed at the full development of humankind by enhancing long-term cooperation in education, science and information and promoting an equitable partnership in the pursuit of social, economic and humanitarian objectives. Turkmenistan has acceded to many international instruments which cover a wide range of issues accorded priority by UNESCO. A particularly important

development in that regard was the inclusion in 2015 of the Görogly epic in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

251. During the celebration of independence in Turkmenistan, State awards are presented and honorary titles conferred upon those who have made a worthy contribution to the development of the country and a range of prizes are awarded in the Türkmeniñ Altyn Asyry ("golden age of the Turkmen") competition, held under the patronage of the President for leading personalities in literature, culture and the arts, young singers and talented children. It should be noted that Turkmen honorary national awards have been conferred on 26 representatives of other ethnic groups living in Turkmenistan and 13 citizens from such ethnic groups have been prize-winners in the aforementioned competition.

Paragraph 29
Access to information and to the Internet

252. Considerable attention is paid in Turkmenistan to the country's information policy. Work is being carried out to set in place the country's own information and telecommunications infrastructure and the legal, organizational, financial and educational conditions are being established for the development of an information society.

253. Internet services provide an accessible source of information for all the citizens of our country. The country's educational establishments are now equipped with modern multimedia and computer equipment and make use of interactive teaching methods. This enables young people to receive a world-class education, to enrich their own lives, broaden their horizons and familiarize themselves with scientific achievements. All those studying at the country's educational institutions, including secondary schools, special secondary establishments and institutions of higher education, make use of electronic library services and have access to the global services of the Internet.

254. Internet cafés have opened up for use by the public in the country's capital and in the provinces. Every year, the number of people using Internet services increases significantly.

255. The Act of 20 December 2014 on the legal regulation of the development of the Internet and Internet services in Turkmenistan defines the principles of law regulating matters related to development of the Internet in Turkmenistan and sets out the legal framework for the provision of Internet services in the country.

256. The information thus provided is intended for the public at large, who also have access to all print publications stored in the country's libraries and to all media reports. The State Museum at the State Cultural Centre has set up its own website, at the address museum.tm, on which information is available about the exhibits in the museum, holiday celebrations and academic conferences associated with the museum's work. The information on the website is regularly updated.

257. On 16 August 2013, a presidential order was issued on the creation of a single digital library network for the central libraries administered by the Ministry of Culture of Turkmenistan.

258. This single library network is now in operation and brings together the 76 central libraries of our country. Through the large-scale introduction of this digital library network it is now possible to render prompt and high-quality services to readers and to provide a high-speed communications system for information exchange between libraries. By replacing the original copies of rare editions and the most frequently used publications in library holdings with audio and digital versions has made it possible to ensure their preservation and to enable them to be used simultaneously by more than one reader.

Paragraph 30
Freedom of religion

259. Under article 41 of the new version of the Constitution, all citizens have the right independently to determine their own religious preference, to practise any religion alone or in association with others or to practise none, to express and disseminate beliefs related to religious preference and to participate in the performance of religious ceremonies.

260. On 26 March 2016, the Act on freedom of religion and religious organizations entered into force. The preamble to the Act states that Turkmenistan, as a democratic and secular State, by guaranteeing freedom of religion and belief, ensures the equality of all, irrespective of their religious beliefs, recognizes the historical role of Islam in the promotion of culture and spiritual life of the people, respects other religions, and recognizes the importance of interfaith harmony, religious tolerance and respect for the religious beliefs of citizens.

261. On the issue of State registration of religious organizations, it should be noted that, under article 17 of the aforementioned Act, State registration of a religious organization may be withheld if:

(a) The aims and activities of the religious organization are at variance with the Constitution of Turkmenistan;

(b) An appraisal by theological experts has found that the organization is not recognized as a religion;

(c) The provisions of the organization's charter and other instruments do not meet the requirements of the Act or contain knowingly false information.

262. Pursuant to article 25 of the Act on freedom of religion and religious organizations, religious organizations have the right to establish and maintain accessible places of worship or venues for religious rites, rituals and ceremonies, and also to maintain pilgrimage sites. Worship, religious rites, rituals and ceremonies are freely conducted in religious premises, facilities and connected areas, in other sites made available by religious organizations for these purposes, in places of pilgrimage, and in cemeteries. Religious ceremonies, rituals and ceremonies may be conducted in the homes of citizens, at their request, subject to the rules of community life and public order, provided that they do not involve large numbers and are not held on a regular basis.

263. Under the Act, public worship and religious rites and ceremonies may be performed outside religious premises in the manner prescribed by the law of Turkmenistan.

Paragraphs 31 and 32

264. With regard to the signature and ratification by Turkmenistan of the Optional Protocol to the Covenant, and also of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, adopted by General Assembly resolution 45/158 of 18 December 1990, the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, adopted by General Assembly resolution of 20 December 2006, and the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, adopted by General Assembly resolution 57/199 of 18 December 2002, we are able to confirm that concerted efforts are being made to that end.

265. In particular, the country's domestic law is being checked for consistency with the provisions of the aforementioned international instruments. In addition, provisions of those instruments are being analysed and studied, along with the arrangements for accession to them. To that end, informational workshops are being held for members of parliament and representatives of relevant State entities, in cooperation with international organizations.

Paragraph 33

266. See information in the Introduction above.